

Author 3

DUXBURY CLIPPER ANNIVERSARY ISSUE, Thursday, May 8, 1975

(Reprinted with permission: The New Yorker Magazine, Inc., copyright, 1975.)

THE END OF MARCH, DUXBURY

It was cold and windy, scarcely the day
to take a walk on that long beach.
Everything was withdrawn as far as possible,
indrawn: the tide far out, the ocean shrunken,
seabirds in ones or twos.
The rackety, icy, offshore wind
numbed our faces on one side;
disrupted the formation
of a long flight of Canada geese;
and blew back the low, inaudible rollers
in upright steely mist.

The sky was darker than the water
-it was the color of mutton-fat jade.
Along the wet sand, in rubber boots, we followed
a track of big dog-prints (so big
they were more like lion-prints). Then we came on
lengths and lengths, endless, of wet white string,
looping up to the tide-line, down to the water,
over and over. Finally, they did end:
a thick white snarl, man-size, awash,
rising on every wave, a sodden ghost,
falling back, sodden, giving up the ghost....
A kite string? - But no kite.

I wanted to get as far as my proto-dream-house,
my crypto-dream-house, that crooked box
set up on pilings, shingled green,
a sort of artichoke of a house, but greener
(boiled with bicarbonate of soda?),
protected from spring tides by a palisade
of-are they railroad ties?
(Many things about this place are dubious.)

I'd like to retire there and do nothing
or nothing much, forever, in two bare rooms:
look through binoculars, read boring books,
old, long, long books, and write down useless notes,
talk to myself, and, foggy days,
watch the droplets slipping, heavy with light.
At night, a grog a l'americaine.
I'd blaze it with a kitchen match
and lovely diaphanous blue flame
would waver, doubled in the window.
There must be a stove; there is a chimney
askew, but braced with wires,
and electricity, possibly
-at least, at the back another wire
limply leashes the whole affair
to something off behind the dunes.
A light to read by - perfect! But - impossible.
And that day the wind was much too cold
even to get that far,
and of course the house was boarded up.

On the way back our faces froze on the other side.
The sun came out for just a minute.
For just a minute, set in their bezels of sand,
the dim, occasional stones
were all of different colors,
with all those high enough throwing out long shadows
and, after a minute, pulling them in again.
They could have been teasing the lion sun,
except that now he was behind them
-a sun who'd walked the beach the last low tide,
making those big, majestic paw-prints,
who perhaps had batted a kite out of the sky to play with.

Elizabeth Bishop